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ABSTRACT

A questionnaire was given to 33 Indochinese (Vietnamese and Laotian) immigrant parents residing in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in order to discover their views of the education their elementary school children were receiving. The results indicated that the parents were, in general, pleased with their children's education. Many felt, however, that school discipline was too lax, and many parents were also concerned that their children were becoming Americanized too quickly and were not learning about their native cultures, histories, or languages. These findings can be used to help teachers establish more effective communication with Indochinese parents, thereby increasing these parents' participation in their children's schooling. (Author/GC)

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ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS OF INDOCHINESE PARENTS

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ATTITUDES AND EXPECTATIONS OF INDOCHINESE PARENTS

In order to understand the reasons for this study, some background information is necessary. I am the Bilingual/ESL teacher in an elementary school in the Albuquerque Public School system. Like many other schools in this country, our school has had a large influx of Indochinese students beginning in the spring of 1979. At the beginning of the current school year the number of Indochinese students at our school was about 60, out of a total school population of 400. The number of Indochinese students has increased to about 100 at the present time.

The school itself is one with low-income families with a multilingual/multicultural student population. APS classifies its students into five language categories, A through E, with A being monolingual in a language other than English and E being monolingual English. This last category has about 100 students, so that 3/4 of the students are not monolingual English speakers to various degrees. At least 15 different languages are spoken in the homes of the students; including Vietnamese, Chinese, Laotian, Thai, Cambodian; several Native American languages; Spanish, and a smattering of individuals from the University married student housing unit. There is also a large Black population in the school.

The faculty and staff at the school, about 36 people, appear to have learned to adjust to the changing population in their school and are concerned that each student gets the best possible

education. They don't get upset when a new Laotian student is assigned to their class. Their complaint is that they already have 26 students and have no extra desks.

In the fall of 1979 the South Area Office of APS sponsored a workshop at Taos, N.M. for its schools. The title of the workshop was "Improving Student Performance--A Multicultural Approach". This will be refered to as the Taos Meeting. Our principal and five teachers attended the workshop, where the main emphasis was on finding ways of raising the low scores of the students in our school. After the Taos meeting the school representatives conducted two afternoon workshops for the others at school. One area of concern of the staff was the general lack of parental participation at our school. Several ideas were discussed, and some have since been carried out, including the formation of a PTA, having a community meeting at school, and starting a community school in the evening for parents.

The present study is also an outgrowth of the meeting. It was felt by our staff that parental participation meant participation by all groups. It was also felt that communication was difficult with many parents because of language differences. In addition, interest was expressed for learning more about how the Indochinese parents felt about education and the education their children were receiving at our school. As a first step in this direction, the present study was conducted.

Methods

The information was gathered with the use of a questionnaire, in which subjects were asked to respond to statements about American and Indochinese education, as well as give their comments.

Subjects

A total of 35 parents filled out the questionnaire. The results of two subjects were not used since they had been in this country for only two weeks. Of the 33 whose responses were tallied, 24 were Vietnamese and 9 were Laotian. Of the 24 Vietnamese subjects, 12 were females and 12 were males. Five subjects were 20-29 years old; 18 were 30-39, six were 40-49, three were 50-59, and one was over 60. The educational levels of the subjects were 9 at the elementary level (grades 1-5), high school - 14 (grades 6-10), baccalaurette (grades 11 & 12) - six, and one who had attended college.

Instrument

The instrument used was a five-point Likert scale response to 20 statements concerning education in the United States and Indochina. The questionnaire was given in the native languages of the subjects by a native speaker of that language. The English version is given in the handout. In addition to the 20 statements, each subject was asked to make three statements each about what s/he liked and disliked about her/his child's

education.

Procedures

The questionnaires were usually given individually, although ten subjects filled them out as a group at a meeting at school. The subjects were asked to read each statement carefully and put an X in column that reflected their feeling about it. If any statement was unclear, a brief explanation was given.

Results

A tally was made of the raw data for each response category for each statement. The raw scores were then converted to percentage scores, since some subjects did not respond to some statements. The results are given in the handout. This lists the statements in descending order of the first category "agree very much". The percentage of responses for each category is included. The order of the statements on the questionnaire was not the same as on the handout.

TABLE 1 HERE

Discussion

This group of parents appears to be happy with the education their children are receiving, since this statement had the largest percentage of responses in the "agree very much" category. They seemed to feel that education was important and less than 10% did not want their children to finish college.

Half felt that their children did appreciate the educational opportunity they had. Understanding of the American educational system was mixed, with a little over one half feeling they understood the system. Most wanted to learn more about the system. They felt satisfied that the schools kept them informed of their children's school progress. They did not feel that the school day was too long (this statement was included because the school day was extended until 3:30 for first and second grades this year, creating some displeasure). Most agreed that teachers' ideas were more important than parents'. Most of the parents agreed that schools should emphasize the basics and teach good behavior and morals.

There were several areas where the parents seemed to feel that some improvement might be necessary, or about which they weren't too sure. Most of the parents agreed that schools in Vietnam and Laos were more difficult than American schools. At least 1/3 of those responding felt that American ways of learning were too easy, while 45% weren't sure. About ½ felt that their children weren't getting enough homework. This statement is difficult to evaluate since some parents had older children. It would be interesting to check this with parents of only elementary school aged children, who don't get much, if any homework. At a parents' meeting with the principal at the beginning

of the school year, parents expressed concern over discipline at our school. I feel that this is one area of cultural differences. At least 2/3 of the parents felt that school discipline was too lax. In talking with parents I have found that they find it difficult to believe that corporal punishment in schools is illegal. On the other hand, some teachers are surprised at the severity of punishment at home.

While 1/3 of the parents expressed no opinion about the schools' Americanizing their children, about 2/3 felt that the schools were Americanizing their children too quickly. This brings me to an area of special interest to me-bilingual/multicultural education. I included statements about this for a couple of reasons. The first was semi-political. There is currently a big boost in emphasizing bilingual/multicultural education within APS. I wanted to gather information from Indochinese parents to hopefully get support in asking that Indochinese students be included in any plans in these programs. My second reason grew out of conversations with students and staff at school. The staff at school seems to be very concerned that all our students learn about their own heritages. But, observing our students, it didn't seem that they were as concerned. At first I was surprised that I sometimes knew more about Vietnamese history and literature than my students. But then I realized that many of them left Viet-Nam at a very young age and had

had no chance to study these things. I was concerned, though, when some students told me they didn't want to learn to read Vietnamese. Perhaps the need to know English is so acute that they have set aside learning their native languages for the time being. At any rate, the responses from the parents in the survey were gratifying and supportive of the school staff. The vast majority felt that knowing two languages was advantageous and they wanted their children to learn about their native countries in school. Most were not sure about the interest of their children's teachers and classmates in their children's native countries, although some did feel that the teachers showed interest. Incidently, upon my return to Albuquerque I'll be attending a follow-up workshop to the Taos meeting mentioned earlier. More of our staff has been invited to attend and we plan to begin work on a multicultural curriculum for our school. This is an area where we can get more cooperation between the parents and staff.

The comments made by the subjects appear to confirm the findings of the response section. Nineteen subjects gave favorable comments, with only nine giving any critical remarks. The most common negative comment concerned lax discipline and lack of respect for teachers by students. One subject felt that there was fighting at school due to prejudice, about which the school should be aware. Of the favorable comments, the largest number

dealt with the way in which the children were being taught and the personal interest on the part of the teachers for each student. Free lunches were viewed with great favor. The other comments dealt with personal hygiene, and concern for children's health, and behavior by the school staff.

Conclusions

Before making any conclusions about the study some precautions should be mentioned. First of all, the number of subjects in the study was small. Secondly, there are probably cultural differences involved in the study. It seems that responding to such a questionnaire may have been a new cultural experience for the subjects. It is likely that Americans would respond differently with more responses in the "disagree" and "disagree very much" categories. Whereas Indochinese subjects are more likely to use the "no opinion" category to state a negative view, so they aren't offensive. The present study would help us understand which responses are "parental responses", as opposed to "Indochinese parental" responses.

In conclusion, it appears that our parents are generally satisfied with the education their children are receiving. Education is important to them and they want the best for their children. They are interested in learning more about the kind of education their children are receiving. Communication seems to be good between school and parents, but can still be improved.

The school needs to continue working to keep the parents informed, and the areas of concern need to be brought to the attention of all the school staff. Discipline is one area that needs better understanding. The "Americanization" of the children is of concern also, and one which will increase as our youngest students reach higher grades. There is support for bilingual/ multicultural education and we need to have parental input as we go about planning our new curriculum.

TABLE 1 - Response Categories

	AGREE MUCH	AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE	DISAGREE MUCH
1. I am happy with the education my child is getting	87%	07%	03%	--	--
2. I hope my child will finish college.	81%	06%	03%	09%	--
3. Being able to speak two languages is an advantage.	79%	15%	03%	--	03%
4. I want to learn more about my child's education.	67%	15%	09%	06%	03%
5. The school should teach good behavior and morals.	67%	21%	12%	--	--
6. I want my child to study about her/his own country.	64%	18%	09%	--	09%
7. The ideas of the teacher are more important than the parents'.	64%	27%	09%	--	--
8. The school always informs me about my child's school progress.	59%	28%	13%	--	--
9. My child should study the basic facts more and play less at school.	56%	25%	16%	03%	--
10. Schools should emphasize the basics of education.	55%	21%	21%	03%	--
11. Vietnamese (Lactian) schools are more difficult than American schools.	35%	35%	29%	--	--
12. Discipline is too lax in American schools.	33%	33%	17%	10%	07%
13. School is Americanizing my child too quickly.	32%	23%	35%	06%	03%
14. My child doesn't have enough homework.	29%	26%	19%	19%	06%
15. I don't understand the American educational system.	26%	16%	19%	35%	--

	AGREE MUCH	AGREE	NO OPINION	DISAGREE	DISAGREE MUCH
16. My child doesn't realize that this is a good chance for her/him to receive an education.	21%	03%	18%	26%	26%
17. My child's teacher doesn't pay attention to her/his native customs.	16%	19%	32%	13%	26%
18 My child's classmates aren't interested in her/his native customs.	13%	29%	61%	--	--
19. The school day is toolong.	10%	--	19%	32%	32%
20. American ways of learning are too easy.	09%	27%	45%	12%	06%